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Flapperism: A National Phenomenon Comes to New Orleans

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
History

by
Tracy Carrero
BA, University of California Santa Cruz, 1998
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Abstract

The early twentieth century ushered in a new type of woman who was independent, opinionated, and determined to pursue her passions on her own terms. She was called the flapper and she became a symbol of modernity who was determined to challenge the traditional values of the past. The flapper phenomenon has primarily been examined from a northern perspective, with little scholarship devoted to flappers in other areas of the United States. Through the examination of college yearbooks, local newspaper articles, and student records, this study examines the characteristics and behaviors that defined the New Orleans flapper and how this northern movement became a southern fad.

Flapper, United States, Southern History, Women's History, New Orleans, Twentieth Century History

Flapperism: A National Phenomenon Comes to New Orleans

*Her emergence was both a consequence of and reaction to a variety of cultural factors, including the ongoing suffrage struggle, women's active role in the war work, the sheer surplus of young women after the war, and most important, the slow but certain disappearance of outdated moral and social norms and values.*¹

The image appeared on the front page of the Friday edition of the afternoon daily paper the *New Orleans Item-Tribune*: a bobbed haired woman proudly displays the back of her decorated “slicker” to the news reading audience. The heading reads, “Decorated Slickers New Flapper Fad in New Orleans,” with the article proclaiming the slicker fad has finally made its way to New Orleans after months of popularity in the north. The article insinuates the flapper modeling the slicker may herself be a northerner as “she is now a resident of New Orleans,” and brought her slicker because it is one of her “treasured belongings.” Several names are inscribed on the slicker: Harry, Tom, and Sander to name a few (more than likely favorite boyfriends of the slicker owner, as the caption implies). On one pocket is the phrase “Keep Out,” on the other “Empty.” On the left panel of the slicker a couple is gazing into one another’s eyes inside a large shaped heart, below that image is the question, “Horse’es Neck Do You?” The images are flirtatious and flippant, meant to pose as both a visual diary and personal manifesto by the wearer. To the modern day viewer these slickers may appear to be charming displays of artwork and phrases on a rain jacket, but these flapper slickers represented far more at the time. They represented a changing viewpoint about fashion, gender and sexuality in the 1920s.

To have several boys’ names scattered about the slicker reveals neither commitment nor allegiance to one boy; this young woman had many suitors and felt compelled to proudly list them on her personal property. There is a reference to “necking” on her slicker which showed she

¹ Emmanuelle Dirix, *Dressing the Decades: Twentieth-Century Vintage Style* (Connecticut: Yale University, 2016), 62.

was not shy about making a sexual reference, though she tried to quell the potential volatility of the question by mentioning a horse, thus making it more silly than salacious. Finally, by wearing such a personal piece of clothing for all of society to see, she dared society to wonder what kind a girl she really was: a proper girl with values tied to the Victorian period or the new “modern” girl who rejected the moral standards of the past and preferred to subscribe to the new attitudes about sexuality and gender roles.

1920s American history is often viewed as a period of massive change. Advancements in technology, urbanization and new societal norms created an American landscape unfamiliar to older generations and one deemed without limits to the younger generation. The aftermath of World War I ushered in a period of prosperity for the United States, but also created divisions between a restless youth and a rigid older generation. One figure to challenge both the older generations’ ideals, as well as some of their peers, was the flapper. The term “flapper” was coined in England. It was used to describe girls in their middle teens, lacking the physical attributes associated with womanhood, but who desired clothing that enhanced their figure while they were going through their awkward phase of adolescence.² The awkwardness was meant literally, and a girl who flapped had not yet reached maturity, dignified womanhood.”³ Though they are often viewed as a symbol of frivolity and excess, flappers represented far more than bobbed hair, rouged lips, and loose hips. She became the symbol of the new modern woman. She challenged antiquated notions about femininity and sexual behavior. She pursued higher education (and not for the sole purpose of finding a husband), was a vital member of the

²Kevin White, *Sexual Liberation or Sexual License?: The American Revolt Against Victorianism* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000), 74.

³ Kenneth K. Yellis “Prosperity’s Child: Some Thoughts on the Flapper,” *American Quarterly* 21 (Spring 1969): 49.

Decorated Slickers New Flapper Fad in New Orleans



The fad of decorating flappers' slickers with pictures and quotations and sometimes with the names of favorite boy friends has reached New Orleans, after having prevailed for months in the north. At Newcomb college the art students have been besieged by their friends and slickers resembling art posters are appearing. The picture above was posed by a flapper now a resident of New Orleans, who brought along her slicker as one of her treasured belongings. Pictures and lettering cover every inch of the garment. Its appearance during the recent rainy days may have started the fad here.

Figure 1. Flapper fashion from the North arrives in New Orleans in the form of decorated rain jackets with personalized art and messages. With the frequent occurrence of rain in New Orleans, there's little doubt the fad quickly spread. (*The New Orleans Item-Tribune* [1926].)

workforce, and with her new economic power, played a pivotal role in the growing consumer market. She was a new breed of woman who boldly asserted her independence and created a new form of feminism.

Most writings about flappers focus on the larger urban centers of the time: New York City and Chicago. However, the flapper movement was a nationwide movement that could be found not only in large urban centers of the north, but smaller southern cities as well. Yet there is little information about flappers in the southern region of the United States. This paper looks at flappers in the southern region, specifically New Orleans. A unique city because of its history, ethnic diversity, and relaxed views on sexuality, New Orleans is fertile ground for flapperism to flourish. Since flappers typically ranged in age from early teens to college age, yearbooks, journals and scrapbooks from Tulane University's Newcomb College were utilized in searching for and examining flapper culture in New Orleans. Local newspapers were reviewed to gain insight into its popularity and its prominence in the city.

The initial goal was to locate flappers in New Orleans, and upon their discovery, evaluate their characteristics and behaviors to see if they aligned with those of the more historically documented Northern flapper. Yet, the Southern flapper faced unique challenges in contrast to her Northern counterpart. She had to contend with a far more rigid society that held manners and morals in high regard, as well as challenge their established feminine ideal, the southern belle who "was not simply a reflection on a southern type; she was also used to model feminine behavior for all American Women."⁴ Hence, with these challenges, this paper sets out to discover whether Southern flapperism was simply a fad--an opportunity to experiment with

⁴ Karen Cox, *Dreaming of Dixie: How the South was Created in American Popular Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2011), 53.

fashion and vices to shock a prudish society still honoring an idealized past--or if it was a social movement to challenge traditional gender roles, social norms and sexual mores of the time.

This paper begins with a brief historiography about flappers, including several from historians who were not far removed from the 1920s period. The paper then defines who the flapper is through descriptions of her appearance, her characteristics and how she interacted with society. There is also considerable discussion of how traditional society viewed and interacted with flappers, as well as details about the tumultuous relationship between flappers and traditional, older society. Finally, there is the examination of New Orleans flappers through the review of college yearbooks, school records, and local newspapers.

The importance of this thesis is to add further scholarship to not only southern women's history, but to the study of flappers. Flappers are often overlooked in history as frivolous party girls who left no important or long standing mark on history. However, if even for a brief moment in history, these young women defied their traditional roles and cultural expectations and established their own rules regarding beauty, femininity and gender relations, they deserve to be recognized and further examined in history.

Flapper: Literature Review

There is no definitive source that chronicles the rise and fall of the flapper. Most writings about flappers are included in general surveys of the 1920s, women's history, or youth culture. However, these surveys offer valuable insight into how flapper culture gained prominence, grew in popularity and finally fizzled out after "The Crash of 1929." Viewed by historians as the preeminent source in the examination of 1920s social history is Frederick Lewis Allen's *Only Yesterday*. Written only ten years after the period, Allen, a renowned American social historian, provides an insightful examination of the changing mood of the country post World War I and the events and circumstances which led to these changes. In his chapter "The Revolution in Manners and Morals" Allen discusses how the "shock troops" went about in their assault on the moral code of the country. The younger generation, particularly young women, "became a special class of outlawed women."⁵ He credits the post World War I "devil-may-care attitude;" the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment; women's newfound independence from domestic obligations and their entrance into the workforce; prohibition; the growing popularity of Freud; the automobile; and the consumption of magazines and films were working together and interacting with one another to make the revolution inevitable.⁶ It is a comprehensive survey of the period and offers a detailed account of the factors that defined the flapper, the characteristics she embodied, and the unique lifestyle she led. Allen thoughtfully examines the flapper movement and concludes it was a revolt against "Victorian" and "Puritan" and an embrace of modernity.⁷ He does not oversimplify the flapper movement's significance or trivialize its importance to the period. His observations lay the groundwork for future scholarship in not only the study of the 1920s, but of flapper history as well.

⁵ Frederick L. Allen, *Only Yesterday*, (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1931), 88.

⁶ Ibid, 94.

⁷ Ibid, 112.

A similar work written shortly after the 1920s is William Preston Slosson's *The Great Crusade and After, 1914-1918*. Published a year earlier than *Only Yesterday*, Slosson chose to focus on the political and diplomatic issues of the 1920s rather than the social and cultural events of the period primarily discussed in *Only Yesterday*. Allen devoted an entire chapter to the drastic changes in morals and manners. Slosson devoted only a few pages to the flapper movement, highlighting changes in courtship and women's fashion, the introduction of the bobbed haircut, and the use of cosmetics. He offers an interesting perspective about societal panic and the attack on morals, saying these "attacks" should instead be translated into changes of manners. He writes, "one must admit that these changes were swift enough after 1914 to alarm the elderly and sedate,"⁸ but if these changes took a decade to transpire instead of just a few years, the level of alarm felt by traditionalists would not have been so severe. Although brief in its examination of flappers, Slosson's work is still noteworthy because it provides yet another scholarly account of flapperdom and its effects on society not too far removed from the flapper period. While *The Great Crusade* and *Only Yesterday* are valuable sources in the study of flappers, both rely heavily on sources and accounts from the Midwestern and Northern regions of the United States; Allen draws from Middletown (Muncie, Indiana) and Slosson mostly draws from New York sources.

Even modern historical accounts about flappers tend to focus on large urban centers in the Midwest and Northeast. Joshua Zeitz's *Flapper* attempts to shed light on not just the popular urban centers of the flapper movement, but also provide an overview of the movement and its significance to American history. Unlike most analyses of flappers, where examination is within a larger context of social or cultural history, Zeitz devotes an entire book to the examination of

⁸ William Preston Slosson, *The Great Crusade and After, 1914-1918*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1930), 150.

flappers. He recognizes the flapper is a complex figure; a “caricature--one part fiction and one part reality, with a splash of melodrama for good measure.”⁹ He attempts to examine not just the popular flapper figures of the period (Zelda Fitzgerald, *The New Yorker* writer Lois Long, and a string of movie actresses), but also considers the small-town flapper. However, his small-town examples still reside in the Midwest and Northern states. Little is revealed about other regions of the United States, particularly the Southern region. Similar to other writers and historians, Zeitz’s flapper exists in New York, Chicago and Hollywood--scarcely anywhere else. Though he supports his thesis in attempting to explain the flapper as the first example of the modern woman in the twentieth century, the flappers he chooses to focus on are no different from those found in other sources of flapper scholarship. Overall, he provides a very well researched history of the flapper, but breaks no new ground in examining other regions where flapperdom may have flourished.

Susan Cahn’s *Sexual Reckonings* discusses Southern adolescent girls between 1920 and 1960 and examines their impact on the history and politics of Southern society. She does not limit her research to one race or class, but instead examines the lives of white and African American girls in the South and how their behaviors and attitudes helped shape modern Southern culture.

In her chapter, “Girl Problem” she explains how “a confluence of modernism, youthful rebellion, and sexual revolution led to a new consciousness among youth...The most sensational and representative figure of this period is the flapper.”¹⁰ Due to industrialization and urbanization, adolescent girls discover new freedoms, both through financial means and through

⁹ Joshua Zeitz, *Flapper: a Madcap Story of Sex, Style, Celebrity, and the Women Who Made America Modern* (New York: Crown, 2006), 123.

¹⁰ Susan K. Cahn, *Sexual Reckonings: Southern Girls in a Troubling Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 16.

their accessibility to new pleasures. Cahn focuses on the struggle between adolescents and their growing sexuality and society's desire to repress this behavior. Particularly intriguing is her examination of middle class African American adolescents (rarely examined in the discussion of flappers) and the culture's attempt to keep the flapper girl from infiltrating their culture. Because Southern African American girls were sexually exploited through slavery and Jim Crow, the African American community insisted on a higher standard of purity for their girls. African American girls were expected to act in a virtuous and moral manner if they had any hopes of attaining respectability and equality in the segregated South.

The remainder of Cahn's book provides examples of how Southern girls used their newfound freedom and power to help change Southern society. Their modern outlook about sexuality helped change the standards of courtship and romance in the south, but Kahn also examines Southern girls' role in desegregating schools in the South and challenging the status quo of race relations in the South. Overall, it provides a new perspective on the flapper movement by not only examining how Southern flappers attempted to change the societal norms of a traditional Southern society, but also by looking at how flappers were not just of one race or class, but crossed over into many segments of society.

Appearance and Vice

The flapper was the rage of the 1920s, but before her was the Gibson Girl—and they could not be further apart in appearance or behavior. A creation through the drawings of artist Charles Dana Gibson in the 1890s, the Gibson Girl was considered the feminine ideal prior to World War I. She was a voluptuous figure, whose curves were accentuated by the aid of a corset and strategic padding. She wore minimal make-up, if any at all, and wore her long hair lavishly styled upon her head. She was chaste, refined and maternal. But by the early twentieth century a new type of woman was gaining popularity as the feminine ideal and “she was the utter repudiation of the Gibson girl, that is, of traditional morality and femininity.”¹¹

The transformation began with her physical image. Rejecting the constraints of the corset, flappers adopted a new style of dress that allowed freedom of movement. It was a vast departure from the restrictive garb of the late 19th century.

The flapper dress was sleeveless, straight-waisted, and short enough to display a significant amount of leg clad in silk or rayon stockings when walking—or particularly when dancing—and flappers wore substantial heels. The look was typical of the reckless, independent, cocktail-drinking lifestyle popularized in the writing of writers such as F. Scott Fitzgerald and Anita Loos.¹²

A boyish frame complimented this new style of dressing, and women no longer attempted to force feminine curves and abandoned the corset for good.¹³ They further muddled the gender rules of dress by beginning to wear pants, or knickers, as they were called at the time. This was troubling to some men like the Young Men’s Club of Evanston, who applied for an injunction to protect their club members from flappers. Justice Max Witkowker denied the request, but sympathized with the men saying, “I agree that flappers are dangerous... They are menacing to the future of mere men. They have already taken to wearing trousers, men’s stiff collars and

¹¹ Ibid, page 45.

¹² Dirix, *Dressing the Decades*, 63.

¹³ Allen, *Only Yesterday*, 104.

men's hats, and I don't know what will be next. Perhaps it is a matter for the federal courts."¹⁴

Women began cutting their long locks into short hairstyles and "caused endless outrage, shock and scandal among the older conservative classes."¹⁵ The bob became the rite of passage into flapperhood. Long hair was synonymous with femininity and beauty and bobbed hair was an act of defiance towards those old standards of beauty. Suddenly women were adopting an androgynous look with regards to their dress and hairstyle and the old ideas about feminine beauty began to change with flappers at the forefront of that revolution.

Shapeless dresses and bobbed hair may have been a rejection of the old ideas about femininity and beauty, but the growing use of cosmetics by flappers was an embrace of something quintessentially feminine. Prior to the 1920s, women who wore rouge and lipstick were considered "unsavory" types; primarily prostitutes.¹⁶ But that belief soon changed when upper and middle class women began wearing "paint."¹⁷ Historian Paula Fass writes, "Cosmetics were used to increase attractiveness, but they were more than that—there were provocative. The use of cosmetics symbolized the woman's open acceptance of her own sexuality."¹⁸ In an article titled, "The Flapper—Can We Do Without Her? She's America's Distinctive Form of Art," published in the *Times-Picayune*, journalist Frederic Haskin argues whether the flapper should be celebrated for her beauty or suppressed because of it and opines "that the modern flapper has done nothing less than to add to the joy and the beauty of this world by learning how to make herself attractive...Who, they ask, really wants to go back to the days of cotton stockings, skirts

¹⁴ "Flapper Beyond Law's Arm." *Times-Picayune*. June 1, 1922: 1. *America's Historical Newspaper* <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.libproxy.tulane.edu> (accessed August 13, 2016).

¹⁵ Dirix, *Dressing the Decades*, 65.

¹⁶ Paula S. Fass, *The Damned and the Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 284.

¹⁷ William E. Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity, 1914-32* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), 173.

¹⁸ Fass, *The Damned and the Beautiful*, 283.

dragging in the dust, hair pulled tight and shiny nose?”¹⁹ Flappers ignored the stigma that was associated with the use of cosmetics and relished the power that resulted in enhancing their physical appearance with a little rouge and lipstick.

The article is accompanied by a cartoon image by New Orleans editorial cartoonist Keith Temple. The image shows the inception of the flapper beauty and features her allies and detractors, as well as her male admirers. What is interesting to note is how many flapper characteristics Mr. Temple touches upon in just a few images. In almost every cartoon panel a woman is seen smoking, a clear indication that smoking was very popular with flappers, and that there were no qualms about smoking in public. The third panel shows a group of flappers congregated around a work desk peering, almost mockingly, at an overly dressed Victorian woman standing near the desk. The cartoon says, “Imagine (if you can) one of those ‘family album-maidens’ in a modern office.” The Victorian woman is no longer relevant in a modern society, in both her behavior and dress. Flappers are now the symbol of modernity, balancing the feminine as well as the masculine. They make efforts to accentuate their physical appearance through beauty products and are unafraid to show their body through dress. Yet, like men, they are active in the workforce and will happily indulge in a cigarette or two.

¹⁹ Frederic J. Haskin, “The Flapper—Can We Do Without Her? She’s American’s Distinctive Form of Art.” *Times-Picayune*, May 1, 1921: Section 40. *America’s Historical Newspaper* <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.libproxy.tulane.edu> (accessed August 9, 2016).



Figure 2. Image accompanying Frederic Haskin's article, "The Flapper—Can We Do Without Her? She's American's Distinctive Form of Art." The article applauds the flapper for her fashion sense and use of cosmetics and proclaims, with the increase in attractive women, the United States "is noted for having the largest supply of feminine pulchritude in the world."²⁰

²⁰ Ibid.

*The flapper drank even as drinking was illegal; she indulged in the “filthy” habit of smoking; and she might swear. Worse, she was quite prepared to be frank and brazen about her sexual activities, huffing and puffing that she suffered from “sex starvation” and avidly reading Freud.*²¹

Flappers not only changed how young women looked in the early 20th century, but also how they behaved in society. Women began to openly drink and smoke in the company of men. This was an affront to the Victorian era ideas about femininity and morality, as well as a slight to the temperance movement and the women who led it. In *Domesticating Drink*, Catherine Gilbert Murdock provides insightful analysis of the gendered culture of alcohol from the late nineteenth century to the repeal of Prohibition and discusses the role flappers played in changing how men and women drank together.

Growing acceptance of women’s drinking challenged the model of pure and pious American womanhood on which the temperance movement was based. Most importantly, it dismantled the traditional linking of masculinity to drink.²²

Female alcohol consumption became an equalizer between the sexes. Since drinking was primarily seen as a male right, a woman’s level of respectability was threatened if she partook as well. Yet, despite prohibition and these questions of respectability, young women drank alongside men in both public and private establishments.

Along with the vice of drinking, smoking also became fashionable to the flapper set. Similar to those who used cosmetics, women who participated in the act of smoking were usually considered of questionable character. Prior to the 1920s, prostitutes and women in the liberated and bohemian circles were most commonly known to smoke in public. With the young women starting to smoke, the fear “was that smoking would have an immoral effect on women because it removed one further barrier from the traditional differentiation of the roles and behaviors of

²¹ White, *Sexual Liberation or Sexual License?*, 74.

²² Catherine Gilbert Murdock, *Domesticating Drink: Women, Men, and Alcohol in America, 1870-1940*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1998), 5.

the sexes.²³ Smoking, like drinking, blurred the lines between the sexes and “was encouraged as a symbol of new achieved equality.”²⁴

The flapper’s challenge to social norms, though disturbing to mainstream society, was no match for the panic she ignited when she began to challenge sexual relations and gender roles. Drinking and smoking in public were troublesome to those who are trying to keep the moral traditions of American society in check, but the behaviors and actions taking place behind closed doors and in automobiles had traditional society fearing for the future of a civilized society. It was not only the older generation who were afraid and appalled; young men also felt intimidated by the modern woman and grew apprehensive of her ever increasing freedoms and desire for independence.

²³ Fass, *The Damned and the Beautiful*, 293.

²⁴ David Kyvig, *Daily Life in the United States, 1920-1940: How Americans Lived Through the Roaring Twenties and the Great Depression*. (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2004), 192.

“We’re not putty in the hands of any man...”

*Most of us are DEFIANT and have made ourselves KNOWN! We’re not AFRAID to be HONEST and HUMAN! We’re NOT PUTTY in the hands of any man unless we want to be! Most girls THINK a pile more than they’re given credit for. Our livers are not cut in half by corset strings! We’re far better INFORMED as a class, and, therefore, know better WHAT TO DO and WHAT NOT TO DO!*²⁵

The above statement was written in the diary of sixteen year old flapper, Nan Livingstone, but could have been echoed by many flappers at that time. Her diary, peppered with flapper slang, chronicled the many dalliances she had with boys (and one man twenty years her senior!)—as well as tales of liquor-fueled nights that subsequently led to petting in automobiles. What is impressive about the above statement and many of her entries was her belief that she held the power in her relationships with men. She was not “putty” in a man’s hands unless she chose to be. This new shift in gender relations is vastly different from Victorian era relations between the sexes. Kevin White writes, “Victorians preferred to deny the very existence of female sexuality. The expected women to conform to ‘the cult of womanhood,’ that is, to be ‘pious, pure, domesticated, and submissive.’”²⁶ Flappers chose to challenge those Victorian ideals and with these drastic changes to courtship rituals and women’s growing economic independence, relations between the sexes quickly transformed.

The popularity of the automobile in the 1920s allowed Americans the mobility to travel outside their town or city and discover new regions and people. A car ride would also offer privacy—especially for young adults. No longer did a man and a woman have to sit in the family parlor with a chaperone; they were now free to share private moments away from the home in the compact space of an automobile. Leuchtenburg writes “Parental control of sex was greatly lessened; the chaperone vanished at dances, and there was no room for a duenna in the rumble

²⁵ Clara P. Goetzinger, *Smoldering Flames: Adventures and Emotions of a Flapper* (Chicago: Zuriel Publishing Company, 1928), 132.

²⁶ White, *Sexual Liberation or Sexual License?*, 7.

seat of an automobile.”²⁷ However, private moments in an automobile were not the only changes to courtship during this period. The methods of courtship had changed and by the late 1920s the “dating system” had replaced the Victorian system of courtship.”²⁸ The invention of dating began in the 1920s. John Spurlock writes in *Youth and Sexuality in the Twentieth Century United States* that “dating had flourished among urban, working-class youth for at least two decades before 1920”²⁹ and became common place among most social classes in the 1920s. Dating became a very popular activity on college campuses and an outlet for women to experiment with their newfound sexuality and independence. This experimentation led to “petting”³⁰ and by the mid-1920s almost all (92 percent) of college age women responding to an interview admitted to petting, with ages ranging from 12 to 25, and the median between 16 and 17.³¹

Post WWI America saw more women entering the workforce and therefore becoming more economically self-sufficient which led to greater feelings of independence for women. This freedom carried over into how they lived and dressed. Their identity was no longer tied to being a wife or homemaker, and because of this, they no longer felt inclined to marry solely for economic stability. Many women, particularly flappers, did not feel the pressure to marry a man right away and instead preferred to indulge in parties, dancing, drinking, and flirting. These postwar attitudes allowed many women to make their own choices in how they associated with men and presented themselves in society.

²⁷ Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity*, 170.

²⁸ White, *Sexual Liberation or Sexual License?*, 75.

²⁹ John C. Spurlock, *Youth and Sexuality in the Twentieth-Century United States*, (New York: Routledge, 2015), 42.

³⁰ Petting had many meanings, but it primarily referred to a couple kissing. Historian Paula Fass contends it is a “broad range of potentially erotic physical contacts, from a casual kiss to more intimate caresses and physical fondling.” Fass, *The Damned and the Beautiful*, 264. Kevin White offers a similar definition when he says it refers to “any sexual stimulation beyond mere kissing, clothed or unclothed...Or it could include “literally every caress known to married couples,” falling short of sexual intercourse. (77).

³¹ Spurlock, *Youth and Sexuality in the Twentieth-Century United States*, 49.

Spurlock further examines the transition from Victorian marriage to modern marriage in white, middle class American marriages in the early twentieth century in his chapter “The Flapper Wife” in *New and Improved: The Transformation of American Women’s Emotional Culture*. The flapper wife, who because of her modern desires for romantic love and pleasure (contrary to the Victorian era), challenges the traditional notions about marriage and love. Spurlock focuses on the detractors of the flapper wife, like writer Beatrice Burton, whose 1925 novel was a warning to the perils of marrying a flapper. She portrays the flapper wife, much like history has portrayed her: independent and headstrong, but with a keen interest in material wealth and partying rather than child rearing and housekeeping. This type of behavior was frowned upon for adolescent girls, but it was deemed completely unacceptable for a wife whose responsibility and duty were to tend to her home and the needs of her husband. The behaviors chronicled in Burton’s novel are what Spurlock attributes to the demise of flapper marriages. He states that the “image of the flapper wife gave expression to anxieties felt by many in the roaring twenties that marriage might not be included among the “new interests, new attractions, new ideals” of the new woman.”³² For the modern woman marriage was no longer a requirement in finding emotional fulfillment or an outlet for economic security. An article featured in the *Times-Picayune* titled “Wrecked Marriages” highlights how economic independence also contributed to modern women feeling less inclined to marry and motivated them to remain independent.

The girls on the other hand do not ‘fall’ as easily as they used to do for the men who are bent upon marrying them. They can earn as much money nowadays as most young men of their own age, and some of them earn more than the young men who come back from the war and failed to catch up in business or in their professions.³³

³² John C. Spurlock and Cynthia A. Magistro, *New and Improved: The Transformation of American Women’s Emotional Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 89.

³³ “Wrecked War Marriages Check on Rush to Matrimony Fewer Weddings Throughout Country Due to Realization,” *Times-Picayune*. Nov. 26, 1922: 1. *America’s Historical Newspaper* <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.libproxy.tulane.edu> (accessed August 13, 2016).

Marriage and flappers became a contentious combination because either men had difficulty adapting to this new “modern woman” and/or flappers had difficulty settling into domesticity; equating it to a life of stagnation and boredom. With advancements in birth control and women’s changing views on sex, intimate relations between men and women became about equal satisfaction and pleasure, not merely serving the needs of the man or an outlet of procreation.

The denial of female sexuality in the Victorian era made women the subordinate partners in marriage, first by denying women full equality of sexuality and second by confining womanhood to motherhood. Contraception freed women from that role assignment and its necessary constrictions at the same time that it permitted a fuller expression of women’s total personality and emotional needs.³⁴

Though flappers were challenging the social norms of the time, most still chose to follow the traditional route of marrying and bearing children in their twenties. However, they insisted the expectations and obligations of marriage be redefined. Historian Patricia Raub says of these changes, “Many women were also beginning to expect more emotional satisfaction from marriage, to look for a mate who would treat them as a partner, not as a subordinate.”³⁵ Even the ceremony of marriage was being redefined. A newspaper article featured in the *Times-Picayune* discussed how Episcopalians were omitting ‘obey’ from church wedding services upon the insistence of flappers. Reverend Dr. George Craig Stewart, Director of St. Luke’s Church in Evanston, Illinois stated: “To eliminate the word ‘obey’ from the marriage ceremony is not a compromise with modern flapperism and feminism, as charged, but is a simple recognition of the

³⁴ Fass, *The Damned and the Beautiful*, 71.

³⁵ Patricia Raub, “A New Woman or an Old Fashioned Girl?: The Portrayal of the Heroine in Popular Women’s Novels of the Twenties,” *American Studies* (1994): 127.

new place occupied by women in our social theme.”³⁶ Young women now wanted to be recognized as equals, not as subordinates to their husbands. Since this challenged the traditional notions of marriage during the 1920s, conflicts ensued and men struggled to define their changing role in marriage. Flappers’ new attitudes towards sex also affected male sexuality as well. Historian Kenneth Yellis writes:

...men had been culturally conditioned to being the initiators and to finding women the passive recipients of sexual advances. The new tendencies in dress and behavior portended and inversion in this scheme, and men reacted vehemently. The flapper costume was seen as a sexual assault, and it was obvious to the men that they were its objects.³⁷

However, Spurlock also mentions how many married flappers were sexually frigid and unable to enjoy relations with their husbands. The conflicting images of the sexually free flapper and the moral code they were taught as girls created a mixed message about female sexuality and pleasure. His assertion challenges the notion that all flappers were sexually confident women who were not bound by the moral constraints of the past.

The changes to interpersonal relationships and the sexual forwardness of the flapper troubled society who viewed it as a gateway into a future devoid of moral principles and chaste women. As Frederick Allen Lewis explained “women were the guardians of morality; they were made of finer stuff than men and were expected to act accordingly”, so for women to now openly flaunt their sexuality and convey their desires to men was seen as a threat to civilized dating practices and gender relations.³⁸ A newspaper article that originated from New York, but ran in the *Times-Picayune*, went so far as to say flappers would cause the next war. In an article titled “Flappers Will Cause Next War, Gasoline Spoils Country Girls,” Reverend Dr. J. Frank Norris

³⁶ “Episcopalians May Omit ‘Obey’ from Church’s Wedding Service Rev. Dr. Steward, Leader in Move, Says Such,” *Times-Picayune* (1837-1988). July 30, 1922: 1. *America’s Historical Newspaper* <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.libproxy.tulane.edu> (accessed August 13, 2016).

³⁷ Yellis, “Prosperity’s Child,” 48.

³⁸ Allen, *Only Yesterday*, 88.

proclaims “ ‘The flapper will bring about this country’s downfall just as surely as Delilah caused Samson’s...Every great war has been traced to the depravity of women, and they never were as bad as they are today.’ ”³⁹ In *The Literary Digest*’s June 1922 article “The Case Against the Younger Generation,” religious leaders, college presidents and deans, and high school principals railed against flappers as well, blaming them for the unraveling of the moral fabric of the country. Editors of *The Review and Expositor* (a Southern Baptist weekly) write:

One hears it said that the girls are actually tempting the boys more than the boys do the girl, by their dress and conversation. Not all the boys and girls are bad, but evil is more open and defiant of public opinion and restraint than was once the case. The situation causes grave concern on the part of all who have ideals of purity and home life and stability of our American civilization.⁴⁰

Flappers were also blamed for men’s moral demise. Though flappers were dressing more for comfort and individual expression, men saw them as dressing solely for the purpose of seduction. When discussing vulgar comments that were made towards women dressed in flapper garb, Daly Thompson, a high school principal in Tennessee, says, “The lad is not wholly to blame for this. The manners of the girls too often warrant such comments. The two to six inches of bare skin between the top of her ‘own roll’ and the bottom of her skirt are conducive to such remarks; so are the transparent skirts.”⁴¹ Hence, men bear no responsibility for their morally corruptible behavior—it lay solely on the women.

Traditional men were not alone in their dislike of flappers. A dean from the Eastern College of Women, who wished to remain anonymous, spoke of the differences between her Victorian era generation and the flapper generation of present. She writes, “I am not prepared to

³⁹ “Flappers Will Cause Next War, Gasoline Spoils Country Girls, Declares Dr. J. Frank Norris.” *Times-Picayune*. April 2, 1922: 1. *America’s Historical Newspaper* <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.libproxy.tulane.edu> (accessed August 9, 2016).

⁴⁰ “The Literary Digest for June 24 1922.” *Old Magazine Articles*. The Case Against the Younger Generation, <http://www.oldmagazinearticles.com/pdf/FLAPPER%20younger.pdf> (accessed April 21, 2011).

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 11.

say that the modern girl is any less moral than we were, but I do say that there are two words which can be applied to her and which she deserves for her conduct-vulgar and brazen.”⁴² Older feminists of the 1920s, who primarily took part in the suffragist movement, did not hold a high opinion of flappers. Viewed as disciples of consumerism and overtly sexual, the flapper’s modern ideas about femininity did not relate to the ideals of older feminists. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, a prominent feminist during the 1920s, observed that “loose women” were a detriment to those women hoping to marry and improve their economic status in society. She writes in *Women and Economics*:

...here enters the vicious woman, and offers the same goods-though of inferior quality, to be sure-for a far less price. Everyone of such illegitimate competitors lowers the chances of the unmarried women and the income of the married. No wonder those who hold themselves highly should be moved to bitterness at being undersold this way. It is the hatred of the trade unionist for ‘scab labor’.⁴³

Though these words were written in 1898, her attitude towards “loose women” did not change in the 1920s. As an older feminist, Gilman viewed flappers as immature and irresponsible because they made little effort to further advance feminist ideals, particularly the economic viability of marriage and the importance of being chaste to ensure its success. Older feminists and young flappers drew more differences than just age; they differed on the methods by which to empower women.

The generational conflict between flappers and the younger generation and the older generation can be attributed to a jaded youth, who after returning from war, found little solace in the societal and cultural rules of the past. The perils of war left many young people with a ‘carpe diem’ attitude towards life. It also left them with feelings of arrogance and invincibility because they believed it was their youthful vitality and vigor that helped win the war. They no longer

⁴² Ibid, 8.

⁴³ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics* (Boston: Small, Maynard & Comp., 1898), 109-110.

saw value in the ideals of their Victorian parents and balked at their authority. Buel Boyd, an editor of a law journal at the University of Kentucky wrote in 1922: "Parental control and supervision are old-fashioned hobbles, having no sympathy from us young folk. Frankly speaking, the war gave us young folk the swell-head. It taught us to believe that we were the strength and safety of the world."⁴⁴ This postwar attitude affected women as well. Ellen Welles Page wrote in "A Flapper's Appeal to Parents" that "The war tore away our spiritual foundations and challenged our faith...The times have made us older and more experienced than you were at our age."⁴⁵ Women, especially flappers, no longer wanted to abide by the traditional cultural ideals of their parents and grandparents. Their world had been turned upside down by war and they were going to determine, by creating their own rules, how to make life normal again. Add to that the "many modern new convenience, such as the automobile, and this set their experiences apart from that of the older generation."⁴⁶

⁴⁴ "The Case Against the Younger Generation", *The Literary Digest* for June 24, 1922, OldMagazineArticles.com, (accessed April 21, 2011).

⁴⁵ Page, Ellen Wells. "A Flapper's Appeal to Parents." *The Outlook* 6 Dec. 1922: 607, <http://www.oldmagazinearticles.com/pdf/Flappers%20Plea%202.pdf>, (accessed April 21, 2011).

⁴⁶ Laura Davidow Hirshbein, "The Flapper and the Fog: Representations of Gender and Age in the 1920s," 126.

Searching for the New Orleans Flapper

Even in the traditional south, flappers found a voice and a platform to express their “modern” views on sexuality and femininity. That many historians have chosen to ignore or scarcely mention the southern region when discussing flappers is perplexing since the quintessential flapper, Zelda Fitzgerald, hailed from the south. Zelda was raised in Montgomery, Alabama and brought up in a traditional Southern household. Her independent spirit and failure to abide by societal norms, along with her love affair and subsequent marriage to F. Scott Fitzgerald (who became the architect of the flapper image) helped define her as the preeminent flapper and provided the blueprint for other girls and women to aspire to. Nancy Milford, who wrote the popular biography of Zelda Fitzgerald aptly titled, *Zelda: A Biography*, succinctly summarizes the appeal and allure of Zelda and the conflict which ensues from being born and bred in the south.

One of Zelda’s attractions was that she was utterly herself; she did what she pleased when she pleased. It would be a mistake, however, to assume she was unaware of the traditional attitude toward southern women even when she ran contrary to it...Women were expected to be submissive, if not passive.⁴⁷

If a girl from Mobile could become the most famous flapper in history, is it possible for New Orleans to produce any other rule breakers--woman who sought to challenge the rigid traditional ideas about Southern womanhood and femininity and embark on a life dedicated to changing how women were treated post Victorian period?

In New Orleans, flappers were mostly visible on college campuses. And as historian Paula Fass points out, “the college campus, especially, provided a fertile social environment for

⁴⁷ Nancy Milford, *Zelda: A Biography*, (New York: Harper and Row; 1970), 21.

the new mores concerning relationships between men and women.”⁴⁸ They were also featured in the New Orleans city newspaper the *Times-Picayune*. In most cases, they were not viewed in a favorable manner. One article tells the frustrating tales of New Orleans restaurants, hotels, Pullman cars and department stores struggling to hold onto their property from the thievery of “souvenir hunters.” One restaurant manager struggles to keep utensils on his tables because youngsters keep stealing them during late night visits to his eatery. He exclaims, “Boys and girls, many of them of the best families in the city, come here after club, steamer, or other dances while their elders go to more expensive places. They throw wheat cakes at each other, twist hat racks and menu holders out of shape, and help themselves to the silver.”⁴⁹ The late night exploits of flappers and jellies⁵⁰ detailed in local newspapers show the frivolous side of flapper behavior, but to better understand New Orleans flappers one must examine them in the environment where they regularly interacted with their peers: the college campus.

Newcomb College, a women’s college located on the Tulane University campus in New Orleans, Louisiana, was established in 1887. Newcomb’s “A Brief History of the College” explains, “In conservative New Orleans, as well as in many other parts of the United States, the separation of the sexes was seen as one of the main reasons for creating colleges specifically for women, including the coordinate college. William Preston Johnston, President of Tulane at that time, was convinced that New Orleans would accept the education of women at Tulane only if

⁴⁸ Fass, *The Damned and the Beautiful*, 261.

⁴⁹ Alice Rightoe. “Flappers and Jellies” Raid Silver on Parties Restaurant Keeper Bewails “Souvenir Hunting.” *Times-Picayune* (1837-1988). July 24, 1921: 23. *America’s Historical Newspaper* <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.libproxy.tulane.edu> (accessed August 13, 2016).

⁵⁰ Jellies or Jelly Beans were stylishly dressed men who were usually the boyfriends of flappers. F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote a short story titled “The Jelly-bean” about an idle man who aspired to improve his social position to win the affections of an upper class woman. (*Tales from the Jazz Age*, 1922). <https://biancadobrescu.files.wordpress.com/2013/06/tales-from-the-jazz-age.pdf> (accessed July 1, 2017).

the girls and women did not intrude upon the studies of boys and men.”⁵¹ Each year a joint yearbook called the *Jambalaya* listed students in attendance, the fraternities and sororities to which they belonged to, and showcased the writings and artwork of students. These yearbooks are a valuable resource when examining flappers in New Orleans because the students who attended Newcomb college in the 1920s were of a similar demographic to the flapper in the Midwest and northeast: white, middle to upper class and educated.

Many, if not most of the women in the yearbook, displayed bobbed hair and wore the prototypical flapper uniform: mid length dress with dropped waist, rolled stockings and small heeled pumps. Some images even show women in knickers, a rare sight outside of the classroom or exercise class. Knickers, or knickerbockers as they were also called were slowly making their way off college campuses and possibly on to the popular streets of New Orleans. The *Times-Picayune* ran a lengthy article titled, “Knickerbockers Being Bought by Flappers of New Orleans,” where the writer questions which brave woman will don knickerbockers on Canal Street. The article wonders how the fad even began:

Just who started the knickerbocker fad in New Orleans in problematical. In taking it up the flappers are but following the example set by flappers in some other cities. In some colleges, it is said, co-eds have long since passed the shy stage and are appearing in classrooms in knickers.⁵²

However, the writer breathes a sigh of relief when he concludes his article by saying, “At Newcomb College knickers have not become as popular as in some other institutions for girls. The Newcomb faculty is not opposed to them, that is, outside of classrooms. However, they are not favored for street wear.”⁵³ Their clothing was not the only drastic change to their physical

⁵¹ Coyle, Georgan and Tucker, Susan. “Newcomb: A Brief History of the College.” <http://www2.tulane.edu/newcomb/newcomb-college-history.cfm> (accessed May, 11, 2011).

⁵² “Knickerbockers Being Bought by Flappers of New Orleans Owners of New Style Garment Said To” *Times-Picayune* (1837-1988). April 2, 1922: 4. *America's Historical Newspaper* <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.libproxy.tulane.edu> (accessed August 13, 2016).

⁵³ Ibid, 4.

appearance to panic traditionalists. As mentioned, many of the class photos from the early to middle twenties almost exclusively show women with bobbed tresses. An anonymous Tulane Newcomb College freshman describes the thrill of getting her hair bobbed and the unfavorable reactions that result in her poem “On Bobbed Hair”:

I
Sometimes you get to feeling tired
And sick of things that be,
And finally, you get all fired
Up to do something—as for me
I bobbed my hair!

II
Gee! It’s strange, and such a change
From prim young miss to child,
It’s bliss—and awfully strange—
It’s daring, still not wild
To bob one’s hair!

III
All the friends declare it’s charming
But mother writes a scolding note,
Dad says he still loves his darling
Although he adds—I hereby quote—
Honey, let it grow!

IV
And oh, it’s such a wondrous comfort—
So cool, and careless, too.
And the wind through it making a sort
Of game—you feel so new—
With fresh-bobbed hair!⁵⁴

For this student, bobbing her hair was not so much an act against outdated social norms, but an act mostly done out of boredom. She says it is daring, but does not see it as wild. However, her parents seem to disapprove of her bobbed hair and the message it conveys to proper society.

The art section of the yearbooks has many flapper images that depict the gayness of campus social life. Several illustrations show the flapper in some of her characteristic images: kissing her beau in a parked car or dancing with abandon--pearls and dress wild in motion. These

⁵⁴ Anonymous, “On Bobbed Hair,” *The Newcomb Arcade* Vol. XIII, no. 4 (June 1921): 306-307.

yearbook images display the characteristics that are so often associated with the flapper and confirm just how prevalent her presence was on campus. Along with these images are several brief writings and poems that provide insight into the characteristics of the New Orleans flapper and reveal her commonality with the stereotypical northern flapper. In “Recipe for a Flapper”, the unidentified writer describes the essential components of the flapper, “To one large part of perfect savoir faire, add rouge and powder, lipstick and bobbed hair...pour in hooch-flavored joy rides, season all...Serve with some gingery dressing-not too sweet-And garnish daintily with jelly beans (Made just the same from Maine to New Orleans).”⁵⁵

A collegiate brother warned his peers about the occupation and pastime of the flapper. He said, “The occupation is gold digging and the pastime is spending the gold. Sometimes as a reward they go in for petting.”⁵⁶ Though negative in connotation, materialism and promiscuity were common attributes associated with flappers and reveal that these characteristics associated with flappers were not just northern or Midwestern traits, but carried over to the southern region as well. Yet, the south made efforts to downplay the growing popularity of the flapper movement, citing their culture as a reason for its inability to truly flourish. An article titled “Southern Girls are Most Moral Says U.S. Expert,” Dr. Valeria H. Parker of the United States Interdepartmental Social Hygiene Board of Washington proclaims “the modern girl is not quite as much of a flapper in the South as she is in other sections of the country” because “girls of Dixie wear longer skirts, drink less liquor, smoke fewer cigarettes and hold few ‘petting parties’.”⁵⁷ Dr. Parker credits Southern parenting for the higher moral character of young

⁵⁵Tulane University, *Jambalaya* (New Orleans, LA:1920) Newcomb College Center for Research on Women, pg. 410, Newcomb Archives.

⁵⁶Tulane University, *Jambalaya* (New Orleans, LA:1925) Newcomb College Center for Research on Women, pg. 348, Newcomb Archives.

⁵⁷ “Southern Girls Are Most Moral, Says U.S. Expert Social Evils Provide Subjects at Health.”*Times-Picayune* (1837-1988). Jan. 13, 1922: 3. *America's Historical Newspaper* <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.libproxy.tulane.edu> (accessed August 13, 2016).

Southern women versus their peers in other regions--and there is probably some truth to her claim. Southern parents, products of the Victorian era and proud to continue the rich traditions of their Southern culture, most likely embraced the conventional ideals of the past and rejected new modern ways and viewpoints prevalent in the larger urban city centers. Yet, despite responsible Southern parenting and traditional societal pressures, many young Southern women who attended Newcomb College succumbed to the allure of flapperdom.

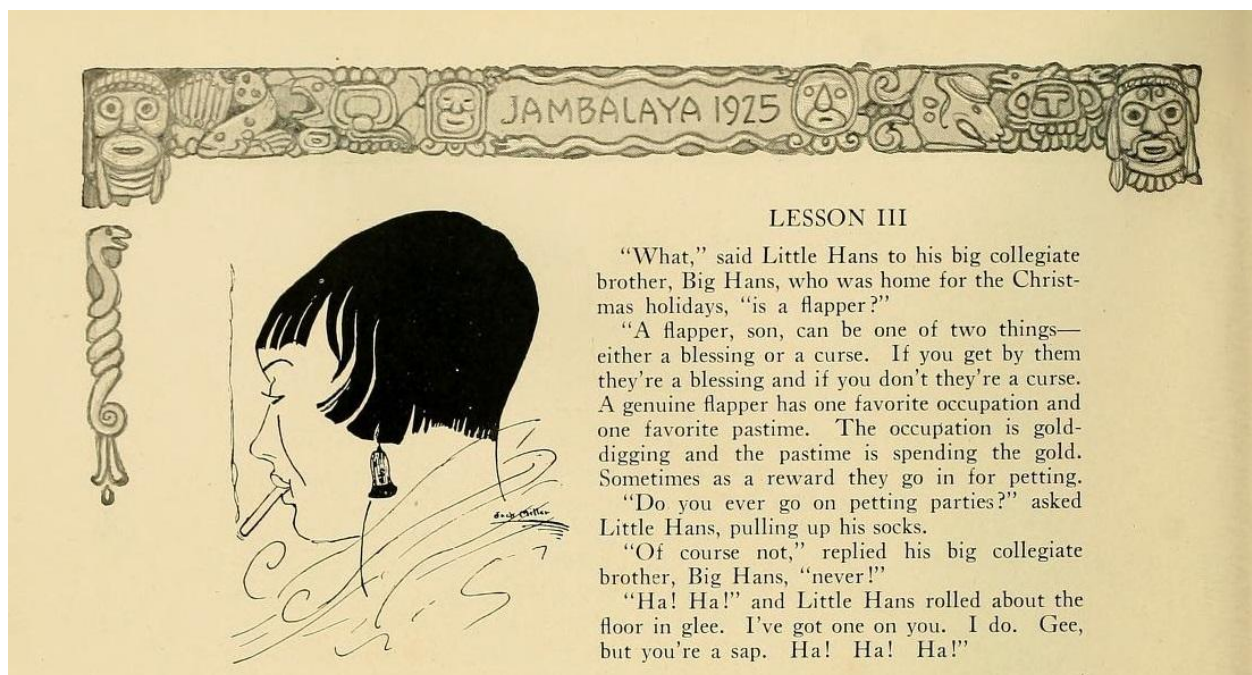


Figure 3. Humor section of the 1925 yearbook features a piece titled "The Tulane Primer." It is an advice piece to Tulane freshmen from Upperclassmen. Lesson III warns men about the "flapper" who can be either "a blessing or a curse." Her hair is bobbed, her earrings lay seductively on her neck and obviously she is smoking a cigarette. (*Jambalaya* [1925], 348.)

Many of the women who attended Newcomb during the 1920s appear to embrace the flapper image, at least in regards to their physical appearance. The 1920 yearbook has several illustrations of flappers, yet very few Newcomb women displayed bobbed hair in their class photos. However, by 1924 most every Newcomb class photo displayed a woman with a short

bobbed hairstyle. Yet, a bobbed hairstyle did not necessarily mean every woman endorsed the flapper lifestyle or her set of ideals. The question to consider is whether these women embraced the attitudes and behaviors of the new modern woman. In attempting to answer this question it is helpful to take a closer look at some of the women who were designated as flappers by the Newcomb student body.

Lynn Robinson was named “Biggest Flapper” in the 1924 *Jambalaya* yearbook. In the yearbook image she is wearing a long coat with fur trim, a large hat, and holding what appears to be a cane or large umbrella. She was the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Guy Robinson, a prominent New Orleans family, and she was regularly featured in the social section of the *Times-Picayune*. Student records show she was a good student; however, it does not appear she graduated from Newcomb College. Her engagement and marriage to John Sneed Williams, Jr. in June of 1927 was well detailed in the *Times-Picayune*, but it was one post-marriage news item that stood out. It recalled her days as a flapper. An announcement mentions her summer plans to North Carolina with her husband, but cannot resist mentioning her previous summers in North Carolina: “She writes with a good touch of humor the change between this year’s visit to North Carolina and those of the many summers before—the summers when Lynn was the cry and the rage, and boys drove miles across mountains to see her. And also, when no dance was complete without her, when her presence was as much of a requisite as the famous jazz bands.”⁵⁸ Though a flapper in college, she eventually conforms to the societal obligations of her culture and class and settles into a life of matrimony and domesticity.

Though no other Newcomb student enjoyed the title of “Biggest Flapper” in the *Jambalaya* yearbooks, there were other students who were identified as flappers by their peers in

⁵⁸ “Peggy Passe Partout’s Letter.” *Times-Picayune* (1837-1988). Aug. 7, 1927: 5. *America’s Historical Newspaper* <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.libproxy.tulane.edu> (accessed August 9, 2016).

earlier editions of the yearbooks. Irma Louise DeMitt, a 1920 Newcomb Senior who hailed from New Orleans was said to have “become Bohemian by joining the ‘Bobbed Brigade’.”⁵⁹ Flora Henry Stanton’s 1921 graduating photo was captioned with “F-quite plainly spells Flapper, cute and clever.”⁶⁰ Bessie Monroe, a New Orleans native and a member of the sorority Phi Mu, was referred to as “the flipperest of flappers”⁶¹ and donned a stylish bob in her yearbook photo. She was active in several clubs and a member of the Newcomb Student Council. She graduated from Newcomb College in 1925 and married two years after graduation. Though her peers may have referred to her as a flapper and she may have participated in a raucous party or two while attending Newcomb, it’s clear she followed a similar trajectory of the privileged peers of her social class. She married a man of similar social stature, had children and led a life actively chronicled in the local society pages. Perhaps that is as far as the New Orleans flapper movement could go—or for that matter –how far it could go as a general movement. Flappers rebelled against the social norms and moral codes of the generation that preceded them, but they inevitably embraced some of its traditional values, like marriage and motherhood.

Strangely, after 1925 there is no mention of flappers in the yearbooks. There are no writings or images available. No senior student is awarded the title of “Biggest Flapper” and there are no poems or stories about their dalliances. Perhaps there was a backlash against flappers at Newcomb or maybe administrative powers put an end to their influence at the college (or at least in the yearbooks). Or perhaps flapperism segued from being a novelty to something conventional and was no longer worth singling out with a designated title or writing. By the mid

⁵⁹ Tulane University, *Jambalaya* (New Orleans, LA:1920) Newcomb College Center for Research on Women, pg. 31, Newcomb Archives.

⁶⁰ Tulane University, *Jambalaya* (New Orleans, LA:1921) Newcomb College Center for Research on Women, pg. 319, Newcomb Archives.

⁶¹ Tulane University, *Jambalaya* (New Orleans, LA:1924) Newcomb College Center for Research on Women, pg. 382, Newcomb Archives.

1920s flapper fashion had been adopted by women of all social classes. The simple design of flapper clothing along with advancements in clothing manufacturing created ready-to-wear fashion that allowed almost any woman to at least look like a flapper.⁶² As a result, what began as a fringe movement became a mainstream movement for the masses.



Figure 4 Lynn Robinson is named “Biggest Flapper in the 1924 Jambalaya Yearbook. (*Jambalaya* [1924], 185.)

⁶² Dirix, *Dressing the Decades*, 64.

Conclusion

*Thus the flapper of the 1920s stepped onto the stage of history, breezy, slangy and informal in manner; slim and boyish in form; covered with silk and fur that clung to her as close as onion skin; with carmined cheeks and lips, plucked eyebrows and close-fitting helmet of hair; gay, plucky and confident. No wonder the house rang with applause; no wonder also the faint hisses sounded from the remoter boxes and galleries. But she cared little for approval or disapproval and went about her "act," whether it were a Marathon dancing contest, driving an automobile at seventy miles per hour, a Channel swim, a political campaign or a social-service settlement. Eventually she married her dancing partner, that absurdly serious young man with plastered hair, baby-smooth chin and enormous Oxford bags, and then they settled down in a four-room kitchenette apartment to raise two children, another "younger generation" to thrust them back stage among the "old fogies."*⁶³

Historian William Preston Slosson's statement about the rise, allure, and fall of the flapper highlights all the components that made her a flourishing figure, as well as a menace to those who valued traditional values and resisted the burgeoning modern lifestyle and culture. The changing attitudes in the aftermath of World War I, along with the growing technological advances, birthed a modern mentality that demanded social change and an embrace of the new. Young women were on the forefront of that change and flappers were instrumental in forcing traditional society to reexamine their beliefs about how women should behave and be treated in society. One of the goals of this paper was to show that the historical contributions of flappers were not merely a haircut or a style of dress, but a new state of mind about female empowerment. By challenging old ideas about gender roles and relations, flappers forced traditional society to reexamine old notions regarding morality, equality, and sexuality.

These challenges were especially contentious in the traditionally conservative South. Since many historical surveys about flappers often overlook the Southern region in their discussions, one wondered if their presence was even a possibility in an area of the country that seemed to cherish the past more than the present or future. In examining Tulane University's yearbooks, scrapbooks and the New Orleans newspaper *Times-Picayune*, it is clear many women

⁶³ Slosson, *The Great Crusade and After, 1914-1918*, 157.

who attended Newcomb College clearly identified as flappers, and judging from the newspaper articles and yearbook stories, participated in many of the familiar social activities of the widely recognized Northern, urban flapper: drinking, smoking, and petting. Yet for the Southern flapper, this phase appears to be more about experimentation than a gateway into a non-traditional lifestyle. This thesis contends that New Orleans flapperism was more fad than social movement, and even though New Orleans flappers shared characteristics similar to Northern flappers in their physical appearance and social vices, ultimately these women did not denounce their traditional feminine roles or societal obligations, subsequently marrying and settling into conventional bourgeois marriages after college.

However, this does not mean that New Orleans flappers contributed nothing to their history or affected future generations. By identifying as a flapper, through their dress or by wearing their hair short, these young women protested against traditional ideas about femininity and gender roles. As a result, they helped pave the way for a new modern era in American history.

There is a general consensus among historians that the depression was the downfall of the flapper movement. Americans could no longer indulge in the lavish lifestyle so commonly associated with flappers. The lighthearted disposition and gaiety of the flapper gave way to a solemn country struggling to pull out of an economic depression. Joshua Zeitz writes, “...Americans living through depression, war, and the Red scare could scarcely afford to indulge in the frivolities of the 1920s. So the flapper slipped out of sight and into memory.”⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Zeitz, *Flapper*, 288-289.

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Vita

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